

Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman
U. S. Department of Agriculture
14th St. & Independence Avenue SW
Washington DC 20250

Dear Secretary Veneman:

These comments are in response to your request for input on the utility of mandatory country-of-origin labeling rules, which the Department is to begin drafting April 11, 2003.

I am the (title) of (name of grocery outlet), located in (city and state). (Add any information about length of service to the community, nature of community, etc.)

I strongly favor the implementation of country-of-origin labeling rules that reflect the intent of Congress by reserving the United States label for fresh meat products from animals born, raised and slaughtered in our country. Overwhelming support for this measure exists in our community among both livestock producers and my customers.

The benefits of strong federal country-of-origin labeling for me and for the community I serve are clear and important:

- It will improve the ability of packers, processors and retailers to identify the origin of contaminated imports in response to an outbreak of food-borne illness.
- It will strengthen consumer confidence in the safety of their food.
- It will provide additional information for consumers about the origin and quality of their food.
- It will increase security of our nation's food supply by creating stronger markets for meat produced domestically.

The cost to grocers like me will be minimal, since we can indicate country of origin through the use of simple placards in the meat case. Many grocers in North Dakota are already responding to consumer demand by labeling meat products as to country of origin.

The only problem is that we currently lack the information necessary for us to label products with the confidence that they do indeed originate from animals born, raised and slaughtered in the United States. Congress now demands that you make this information available to us. By doing so, you will enhance our ability to meet the demands of our consumers, who increasingly want to know where their food comes from.

Yours truly,

